



“And when a man seriously reflects upon the idolatrous homage shown to the persons of kings, he need not wonder that the Almighty, ever jealous of his honor, should disapprove a form of government which so impiously invades the prerogative of heaven.”

Thomas Paine, Common Sense, 1776.

The First Commandment and the Fourth Of July

Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, to this day the best selling political pamphlet of all time, is credited with providing the spark that fired colonial sentiment for Independence in 1776. Paine devoted one-third of his text to the argument that hereditary monarchy was a form of idolatry and, thus, expressly condemned by the First Commandment. Though hardly a believer himself, Paine drew on a longstanding anti-monarchical tradition in appealing to a populace, ignorant of Locke and Montesquieu, who were well

read in, as one Revolutionary War veteran put it: “only the Bible, the Catechism, Watts’ Psalms and Hymns, and the Almanac.” For this audience, Paine thundered against the British Monarchy as “the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry.”

Upon hearing the news of the Declaration of Independence in July of 1776, New Yorkers pulled down the gilded lead “idol” of George III in Bowling

Green Park. The lead was used to supply 42,000 bullets for Washington’s army

Sources: Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776.
F. Manion, *Idols and the King*, *Touchstone*, Nov. 2006.
S.E. Morrison, *Oxford History of the American People*, at 212-13.

Illustration: *Toppling the Statue of George III*, July 9, 1776.